UNDERSTANDING THE STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS IN ADVISOR IN THESIS SUPERVISION: CASE STUDY OF MKT672

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Abstract

The role of thesis supervision is to encourage students to develop sound research skills, to advance and create knowledge and become critical thinkers in their chosen fields of study, and to conduct enquiries in their areas of specialization in a professional, expert and ethical manner. Thesis quality and acquired experiences are highly dependent on their advisors. This paper investigated the expectations of the final-year students towards their thesis supervisors in writing their thesis and how thesis advisors can help the students to meet with their expectations. The data were collected using focus groups interviews with ten final year undergraduate students of UiTM Johor. The results of the research discovered that the students want to be independent and able to show their research skill at the initial stage of the research stage, with the guidance and continuous advice from their advisors. However, they need more assistance in the later stages; checking grammar and deciding on the methodologies; ensuring that they submit on time and monitoring their progress. It is hoped that this results of this paper will enable academic managers to create new curricular and programs in assisting both students and advisors on the effective thesis supervision.

INTRODUCTION

Research quality has always been the academic concerned for every university. To ensure high quality of research there is a need for a highly dependent supervision in managing the thesis done by the students. In supervising the students, it requires some supervising experience from the supervisor. It is important to ensure that the advisor and the student best fit, the expectation of both parties must be cleared on few important expectations. The process of writing thesis has post many challenges in the area of supervision in meeting both expectations (Ghadirian L, Sayarifard A, Majdzadeh R, Rajabi F, Yunesian M, 2014).

Supervision is a factor that contribute to the dissatisfaction with the system of higher degree studies (Moses, Ingrid, 1984). Much of the confusion and possible break down in supervision can be overcomed or prevented if the expectations are clarified at an early stage. Expectation can be in terms of areas of research or study, interpersonal communication, schedule of meeting, and advisors technical assistance in guiding the thesis writing. Some of the solution on the administrative side is to have some kind of guideline for the advisors, clarify the role for advisor/students, and outline the formats for the thesis writing. Despite this guideline, advisors and students still have many qualms about their role and see far more areas of difficulty in this structuring supervision.

Writing thesis is used as the first systematic step for familiarizing students with research in evaluating them indvidual competence especially for undergraduate students (Ghadirian et al 2014). In undergraduate assessment, all based on extensive and well documented case studies leading to clearly formulated guidelines, compared to assessement for PhD and masters levels. Unfortunately, despite many clear layout outline given to students, they are still unable to complete on time. Many advisors are aware of this challenging task.

This is because thesis writing requires ability and skill from the students, as they are come from different discipline and required them to spend their time independently. It also depend on the student oneself character and time managementand student's experience undergoing their internship programs in various place and situations.

Many of previous studies focused on thesis supervision for postgraduates level, less attention is being given to the undergraduate supervision in thesis writing. Although, the thesis for undergraduate are of clearly cut requirement and standard, than master's or PhD level, but still the topic of the thesis or the course of the thesis, need to be discuss between both the student and the advisor. Both need to come together to decide on the making of the thesis. This relationship require them to arrange or schedule meetings with their advisors in meeting the deadlines of the thesis. Whether the advisors or the students need to come to an understanding of the expectation and role that being played by each other is the factor that ensure success in thesis supervision.

Many advisors still have problem meeting the expectation of students and so are the student towards their advisor. The students are still unclear about many things concerning thesis writing. These includes the responsibility in selecting topic and theoretical framework the thesis, the number of meetings required, the amount of independent time and freedom working individually, the total responsibility for the content are appropriate and relevance and many others including whether close personal relationship is required between them.

Therefore, by asking the student about their expectations, we will find out if students' supervisory needs have changed and develop during the course of their research (McCallin & Nayar, 2012).

This present study want to address the issue regarding the undergraduate student's expectation, thus meeting the expectation from both advisor and the students, in order for the advisor to be able to facilitate the student effectively. It is critical that these advisor know and aware of their students level of understanding on writing thesis and also their expectation for better experience and outcome. Therefore, this study aims to answer the two research questions below.

Aims of the Study

This study is crucial as to answer these two research questions:

RQ1: What are the expectations of the final-year students towards their thesis supervisors in writing their thesis?

RQ2: How can thesis advisors help the students to meet with their expectations relating to the writing thesis of undergraduate students at UiTM Johor?

Thus, this study intends to on the following research objectives:

1. To explore the expectations of the final-year students towards their thesis supervisors in writing their thesis.

2. To explore ways thesis advisors can help the students to meet with their expectations relating to the writing thesis of undergraduate students at UiTM Johor.

Review of Literature

Thesis advisor is the person who provides time, expertise and support for the students to develop research skills during thesis preparation process and who is a guide for them to prepare a thesis in acceptable standards (Tuesta, Delado, Mugnaini Digiampietri Mena Chalco & Perez – Alcazar, 2015). Their role is to support the training transfer and knowledge in conducting research. Their are responsible for directing and evaluating the student performance.

In meeting the students' expectation, the advisor need to provide some time, give constructive feedback and able to persuade the student to work independently. Advisor is also expected to make the student realized some of the potential problems and help them to manage their thesis on time (Ali, Watson & Dhingra, 2016). The students and the advisor must come to a consensus about some important matter firstly, some aspect of the the work which have been highlighted to them in term of the topic and their topical progress (Svinhufvud & Vehvilainen, 2013), secondly, the meeting timelines set in relation to task outcome (McAlphine, McKinnon, 2013), and thirdly the frequency of meeting or how often the meeting should be conducted (Moxham, Dwyer & Reid Searl, 2013; Kimani, 2014). For the first meeting, advisor and student should focus on the research problem and some theory application and then in the next meeting continue with methodology and so on depend on the topical progression (Jaldemark & Lindberg, 2013).

When the student and their advisor are clear about meeting both parties expectation and able to play their role as expected, it will helpthem in a successful in completing their thesis in a timely maner. Therefore, meeting the students expectation is important as it has effect on the student satisfying experienceduring their journey in completing their thesis (Moxham, Dwyer & Reid Searl, 2013).

The Role Perception Rating Scale (RPRS) developed by Moses (1985), traditionally advocates three distinct stages of supervisor involvement: helping the student to choose a viable topic and initiate data collection (Topic/Course of Study), monitoring student progress (Contact/Involvement), and writing up (The Thesis). It would appear that students can interpret how they want to supervised, regardless of their level of expertise, their awareness of the subject matter, or their own experience of thesis writing.

Sample

The course, Industrial Training Report (MKT672) is taken by all UiTM final year students of BBA (H) Marketing. In UiTM Johor, there were 56 students who took the course in the semester March – June 2016. As an exploratory study, only a fraction of the population is needed as sample for the study. The judgment sampling technique was adopted. Students were asked to answer a call for participation on Facebook group (MKT672_Semester Mac-Jun 2016). On the closing date, twelve responded but only ten turned up at the Focus Group session.

Data collection methods

Interview protocol

Focus group interviews were conducted between 14th to 16th April 2016 with the respondents, at 4 different time and locations. Members of the focus groups were identified after groups of students who agreed to become our respondents. They are ten final year undergraduate students (as Table 1). They were briefed on the objectives of the study. The interviewers asked questions adopted from the RPRS to get information regarding their expectations on thesis supervision, undergraduate perspective. The interview sessions were verbally recorded with permission. Before the interview sessions started, the researchers already prepared the list of questions that need to be asked. The interviews were transcribed for data analysis.

NO.	RESPONDENT ID	PLACE OF INTERN	CHAPTER COMPLETED
1.	R1	Ramada Plaza Hotel, Melaka	Chapter 1
2.	R2	Prudential BSN Takaful, Kluang, Johor	Identifying Topic
3.	R3	Global Ijtihad, Johor Bharu	Identifying Topic
4.	R4	Permodalan Nasional Berhad, Kuala Lumpur	Selecting Topic
5.	R5	Nova Babylon Sdn Bhd, Segamat, Johor	Chapter 2
6.	R6	Kedai Rangkaian Sunnah An Nur, Shah Alam	*N/A*
7.	R7	Takaful Ikhlas, Skudai, Johor	Chapter 1
8.	R8	Intellectual Property Corporation, Kuala Lumpur	Chapter 1
9.	R9	Public Mutual, Johor Bharu	Chapter 1
10.	R10	Food Manufacturing, Batu Pahat, Johor	Chapter 1

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Data Analysis Method

Qualitative data analysis involves the identification, examination, and interpretation of patterns and themes in textual data and determines how these patterns and themes help answer the research questions at hand. They are (NSF, 1997): not guided by universal rules, a very fluid process that is highly dependent on the evaluator and the context of the study, and likely to change and adapt as the study evolves and the data emerges.

The focus group interviews have produced a wealth of data but not all of it is meaningful. After data has been collected, they had undergone a data reduction process in order to identify and focus in on what is meaningful. This is the process of reducing and transforming the interview - raw data. The process is to determine what is significant and transform the data into a simplified format that can be understood in the context of the research questions (Krathwohl, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994; NSF, 1997). To determine meaningful data, we need to refer back to our research questions and use them our framework. Data reduction was done by looking for specific patterns and themes of interest while not focusing on other aspects of the data.

The Thematic analysis – grouping the data into themes that will help answer the research question(s). These themes may be (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003) were employed in this study. It was directly evolved from the research questions and was pre-set before data collection even began. Once the themes have been identified it is useful to group the data into thematic groups so that you can analyze the meaning of the themes and connect them back to the research question(s).

Conclusion drawing and verification are the final steps in this study qualitative data analysis. According to Krathwohl (1998), Miles and Huberman (1994) and NSF, (1997): reasonable conclusions were drawn by: (1) interpret what all of your findings mean; (2) Determine how the findings can help answer the research questions and (3) discuss the implications from the findings.

Findings

Topic/course of study
A number of respondents found that they are responsibilities to select the topic and they have the right to choose their theoretical framework if it conflicts with that of their advisors. They are also asked by their advisors to decide on their own problems to be studied.

> *The first time meeting with my advisor, I check the title and the objective of the study with her and I was asked to make changes (R1).*

> *The research that was proposed by advisor involved the company's sales and they are private information. So I decided to do on their marketing issues and not on sales (R3, R8); using online sales to promote company's business (R5) and promote Takaful to non-Muslim (R7, R9).*

> *We discussed and together on the topic with the advisor (R1, R2 & R10).*

The respondents were asked whether they prefer to work independently on their schedule appropriate to their own needs and they see that both the students and advisors must together work on it. Being novice researchers, they have little experience in time management between internship and thesis writing.

> *I have problem deciding how long to complete each stage of the research. So, I requested my advisor to help me (R1 R2, R3, R7 and R9).*

> *Since I am working at that company, I think I should decide on the issue and topics of my research but I also need my advisor to agree and give permission for me to proceed (R4).*

> *I wanted to do on Internal Marketing as I see as an important issue at the company but my advisor wants me to do Islamic issues. So, I had to look further and took longer time to decide on what I really want to do (R1).*

> *We should give opinion to our advisor and she will decide on the best problem to be studied. She has more experience in doing research. Her opinion is best to follow (R5).*

Most advisors prepare schedules for their students (R6, R7, R8 and R9), some prepare their own (R1, R3, R5 and R10) and few respondents noted that they do not work according to any schedule (R2 and R4).

In completing a well researched thesis, the students may need adequate access to online database journals. This could be a problem since they do not have access to them freely. They all agreed that advisors should assist them with getting these references.

Contact/Involvement

The respondents informed that they prefer informal relationship with their advisors. This will make them feel comfortable and able to communicate freely with their advisors.

They also agree that they should initiate meetings with their advisors. One respondent suggested that:

> *I love to be close to my advisor. For me, close s since our thesis is also formal (R1).*

When discussed about who should initiate meetings with the advisors, they all agree that

students should do it. However, most advisors are teaching during the semester. So they need to make prior appointments before meetings. Sometimes it is difficult to fit in to each others' schedule. Note: the weekends in Johor state is Friday and Saturday. Most of the respondents did their internship in Johor. So, there is a bit of a problem to make appointments. Unlike their friends who did their internship outside Johor, they usually make appointment to meet their advisors on Sundays.

The Thesis

The respondents found that the advisors need to make the work is submitted on time except R2.

> *My advisor has the responsibility to make sure I will submit our proposal on time (R5, R6, R8, R8 and R10).*

> *I prefer to work by myself. I think students must be responsible for their own work. Advisor's role is to advise and make corrections to our work (R2).*

In terms of deciding which methodologies to be used, there are mixed answers.

> *Advisors should decide because I don't know which is best (R1, R2, R6, R8, R9 and R10).*

> *For me, the thesis is mine. So I need to decide on my own (R3).*

> *I decide on my own. My advisor did ask if I want to do qualitative but I want to do quantitative method. So I did quantitative because it is my decision (R2).*

When asked if advisors should check their language and grammar, half of them said advisors should do it as their English language is better than the students (R1, R3, R5, R7 and R8).

Most of the respondents (R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R8 and R9) agreed that their advisors should check their work by sections (or chapters). A respondent (R10) prefers to work independently. One refused.

> *I will submit when I have completed the chapter (R10).*

> *I don't like to be forced. I am forced, I will be pressured (R2).*

Discussion

   The findings have shown that the undergraduate students interviewed in the focus groups agreed that they expect their advisors help them in guiding and advising them throughout the thesis writing process. They are able to handle the initial stage of the process: identifying problems and deciding on the topics. Few want their advisors to discuss with them on their progress and provide them with schedules.

   They also need their advisors to provide access to the online database and help them find useful articles.

   They prefer informal relationship with their advisors; make them comfortable and able to share problems with their advisors. However, they want to have control of their work and do not need their advisors to keep reminding them of deadlines. On the contrary, they need their advisors to check on their works- grammar checking and methodologies that they use.

This may due to the fact that they are novice researchers and need guidance of the proper way of handling research.

Conclusions

Previous studies on postgraduate students often emphasize on independent work and professionalism. Their advisory roles are predetermined and often discussed by past researches. However, studies on undergraduate students are less studied. Probably because they are of lower importance and less discussed. This is no longer true. As the academic world has changed towards research-based, thesis supervisory is discussed at all levels in the academic literature.

As it is not the point of doing qualitative research to making any generalization, the findings can provide the academic managers adequate information in formulating new effective curricular in thesis supervision. Future research can attempt to predict its implications through generalization out to a larger population.

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